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*An Extract from a Letter of the Rev. Mr. John
Hellins, formerly Assistant to Mr. (now Dr.)
Maskelyne, the Astronomer-Royal at Greenwich
Observatory, to Francis Maseres, Esq.*

*Dated Potter's Pury, near Stoney Stratford,
in Buckinghamshire, Sept. 25, 1792.*

MR. MUDGE's ignorance of several things which he has the temerity to advance in his reply, and the abuse with which his pamphlet abounds, are, in my judgment, marks of weakness; as they would hurt even a good cause. I am under no sort of influence from Dr. Maskelyne. Such is our acquaintance that I have not seen him since January 1790, nor received a letter from him during that space. But I think it proper to relate, that, when I came to be the Astronomer-Royal's Assistant (which was at Michaelmas 1773), Mr. Harrison's Time-keeper was still in a box in the Transit-room of the Royal Observatory; from which box it was taken every day soon after noon, wound up, compared with the clock in that room, and then put into the box again*. As this was to be part of my business there, Mr. Maskelyne

* N. B. The attendance of the officers from Greenwich Hospital had ceased before I came to the Royal Observatory

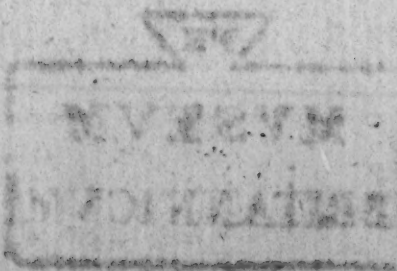
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(his degree of Doctor of Divinity was taken afterwards) not only explained to me the manner of doing it carefully, but actually did it himself several days, while I stood by him; and he explained the reason for taking hold of it in a particular manner, and putting his thumb into the ring, and carrying it with both hands, that it might not slip from him. He also walked slowly with it between the box in which it was kept, and the board on which it was compared, and took care not to turn suddenly about with it, and told me his reasons for so doing. And I well remember that, the first time I did this business, he stood by me to see that I had learnt the same careful way of handling the watch. Afterwards I had the care of this watch, as well as of all the rest that were tried during my assistantship at the Royal Observatory, amongst which was one made by my countryman Mr. Mudge: and they were all handled by me with great care.

I have to add, that, when I saw Mr. Mudge's watch going better than any other which had come to my hands, I felt a sort of pleasure in recollecting that it was made by a Devonian, though I had never seen Mr. Mudge. I remember too, that the Astronomer-Royal expressed a pleasure in seeing how well Mr. Mudge's watch went.

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On the day in which it stopt (which Mr. Dutton supposed was while I was carrying it back to the great room), it had the same careful treatment from me. And, considering that the greatest turn I had to make was in going from the board where all the watches were compared, and that I had more than 30 yards to walk before I came to the window-board in the room where the watch was kept, with the face of the watch uncovered before me, I think it highly probable that, if the watch had stopt in consequence of the horizontal motion it received in my return with it, I should have seen it.

In short, during my stay at the Royal Observatory (which was from Michaelmas 1773 to May 1776), though Mr. Maskelyne made proper inquiries after the watches, yet, except the first few days which I have mentioned above, he seldom wound up any of them; but, whenever he chose to do part of that business with me, he did it with the greatest care. And I am confident that he enjoyed an income which would have set him above the temptation to any base action by the watches, even if their Makers and the Astronomer-Royal had been competitors for the same reward (which was not the case), and that he possessed a mind superiour to it, if he had been in narrow circumstances. The ideas of running with the watches, knocking their sides against any thing, and
thumping;

thumping them down upon a table, are such as would hardly enter into the head of any one but a fellow who delights in wanton wickedness.

I shall only add, that I have never been a candidate, nor am ever likely to be one, for any of that money which Mr. Mudge says the Astronomer-Royal has the disposal of; but write this to serve the cause of truth, and to do justice to an injured character; and to that end you have my leave to shew this letter to whomsoever you think proper.

P. S. Is not Mr. Mudge very inconsistent, in the midst of all his abuse of Dr. Maskelyne, to represent him, more than once, as having the sole direction and management of the board of longitude? Surely, when we consider the number, the ample fortune, and the great learning, of the commissioners of that board, we cannot account for this great influence over them, for so many years, but by supposing Dr. Maskelyne to be a man of vast abilities and strict integrity.

